A look at the satellite communications roadmap for the joint warfighter

Joint Family of terminals

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LANGLEY AFB, Va. —The Air Force, in collaboration with the other Services, has begun the difficult process of overcoming its stove-piped, program-focused acquisition policy in regards to Military Satellite Communications terminals and is embracing the concept of a Joint Family of Terminals, or JFOT, to more efficiently support the warfighter.

The Air Force accelerated its effort toward achieving commonality and interoperability across MILSATCOM terminals by establishing the **Air Force Satellite Communications Terminal Roadmap**. The AFSTR outlines the strategy the Air Force will use to coordinate and integrate operational capability requirements, and then acquire, field and sustain SATCOM terminals within the Air Force. **Ultimately, the Air Force hopes to reduce the burden placed on manpower, training and logistics associated with SATCOM operations**. The three primary initiatives outlined in the AFSTR address:

▸▸SATCOM terminal synchronization with on-orbit resources;

▸▸migration of SATCOM terminals to the Transformation Communications Architecture; and

▸▸an initiative to create a JFOT to reduce the Services' proliferation of numerous, non-interoperable terminals.

However, to truly achieve the JFOT goal, one must first address the requirements as stated by the Combatant Commanders. In May 2001, the SATCOM Senior Warfighter Forum unanimously expressed concern regarding disconnects between satellite launches and terminal procurement/fielding. **They concluded a lack of terminal fielding synchronization with on-orbit resources and capabilities would reduce SATCOM availability during a time of significant requirements growth.** It was determined that the Services Major Commands' funding and acquisition of SATCOM terminals had not maintained pace with the Combatant Commanders' requirements in support of critical operations. The AFSTR addresses the need for the Air Force to fix the current process which has led to poor synchronization between space and terminal segments and terminal fielding alignment with operational objectives.

Current MILSATCOM terminal acquisitions do not provide the warfighter with required commonality and interoperability. Additionally, the current approach places unnecessary stress on manpower, training and logistics support. The Air Force and the other Services have reexamined the SATCOM terminal requirements stated by the Combatant Commanders and are adjusting current funding and acquisitions accordingly. **If we are to realize the increased capability of TCA, the Services must follow the AFSTR migration path and synchronize terminal fielding with satellite launches.** Achieving the goal of a joint family of terminals will significantly enhance the warfighters' ability to conduct net-centric operations.

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